

LOK SABHA DEBATES

LOK SABHA

Thursday, March 20, 1997/Phalgun 29,
1918 (Saka)

The Lok Sabha met at One Minute Past
Eleven of the Clock.

[MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER in the Chair]

[English]

DR. M. JAGANNATH (Nagarkurnool) : Sir, I have an important question.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Which question are you referring to?

(Interruptions)

DR. M. JAGANNATH : This is a very important question because the Expert Committee has found fault with Karnataka on the Alamatti dam issue saying that they have violated the Bachawat Award.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Let us have it after Question Hour please.

(Interruptions)

SHRI S.K. KARVENDHAN (Palani) : Sir, the Government of Karnataka is not taking steps to solve the problem.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Please cooperate now.

(Interruptions)

DR. M. JAGANNATH : All the objections have been overruled by the Committee. Hence, the Government must immediately stop construction of the dam. All construction work should be stopped forthwith ... (Interruptions) The Centre must cancel all the clearances given for this and also stop funding this project.

SHRI S.K. KARVENDHAN : The Cauvery issue should be solved and drinking water should be provided for the people for Tamil Nadu... (Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : You will surely get a chance after Question Hour. Do not break conventions. Please sit down.

DR. M. JAGANNATH : All right. Thank you.

11.02 hrs.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

[Translation]

Out of Order Telephone Exchanges

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*361. SHRI RAM TAHAL CHAUDHARY :
SHRI RAMSHAKAL :

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether most of the exchanges, telephone

towers and telephones installed in the rural areas and villages are lying out of order;

(b) if so, the details of such villages, State-wise;

(c) the reasons alongwith the time since when they are out of order;

(d) whether loss of worth crores of rupees is being suffered as a result thereof;

(e) the reasons for not implementing the schemes meant for repairing of the out of order telephones in these areas;

(f) whether several officers have been found responsible in this regard; and

(g) if so, the details thereof, State-wise?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA) : (a) and (b) 12 small exchanges in J and K are lying damaged, 86 small exchanges in Andhra Pradesh burnt due to militancy/terrorism. 11264 Village Public Telephones are also lying out of order, out of total 2.49 lakh VPTs due to various reasons. The details are given in the Statement-I.

(c) Statement-II is laid on the Table of the House.

(d) Statement-III is laid on the Table of the House.

(e) Sir, schemes are being implemented and following instructions/guidelines have been issued to all the field units to further improve the working of village telephones :

(i) Testing of the Village Public Telephone (VPT) should be carried out daily by dialling from the exchange.

(ii) Testing of MARR link should be carried out daily from the base Station.

(iii) Battery set for Remote Subscriber Unit (RSU) should be checked up at regular intervals.

(iv) Solar panels may be installed immediately wherever these are not provided so far.

(v) As an interim measure Annual maintenance contracts for the repair of Printed Card Board and unit may be entered into by the circles. The field units are progressively taking action in this regard.

(vi) The staff may be trained in the maintenance of MARR systems.

(vii) Introduction of better and reliable technologies for providing village telephones.

(f) and (g) A thorough inquiry into the veracity of the reports of the field formations regarding functioning of VPTs has also been ordered through an independent agency the selection of which is under process.

CBI has also been asked to investigate as to whether all norms of administrative, technical and financial propriety were observed while ordering and procuring the MARR equipment for VPTs.

Statement-I

Telephone exchanges and village public telephones lying faulty.

(As on 10.03.1997)

S. No.	Name of Circle	No. of exchanges	No. of village public telephones
1.	Andaman and Nicobar	—	—
2.	Andhra Pradesh	86	164
3.	Assam	—	243
4.	Bihar	—	3347
5.	Gujarat	—	73
6.	Haryana	—	—
7.	Himachal Pradesh	—	44
8.	Jammu and Kashmir	12	205
9.	Karnataka	—	119
10.	Kerala	—	—
11.	Madhya Pradesh	—	3046
12.	Maharashtra	—	204
13.	North East	—	359
14.	Orissa	—	1236
15.	Punjab	—	15
16.	Rajasthan	—	255
17.	Tamil Nadu	—	45
18.	Uttar Pradesh (E)	—	811
19.	Uttar Pradesh (W)	—	604
20.	West Bengal	—	494
21.	Mumbai	—	—
22.	Calcutta	—	—
23.	Delhi	—	—
24.	Chennai	—	—
Total		98	11264

Statement-II

The small exchanges as stated in (a) and (b) above are lying out of order since 1990 and onwards in the States of J and K and Andhra Pradesh due to damages caused by militancy/terrorism.

Regarding Village Public Telephones, about 11264 Village Public Telephones (VPTs) are lying faulty as on 10.3.97. Out of faulty VPTs, 1000 are lying out of order for less than one month, rest are lying faulty for more than one month. The main reasons for VPTs remaining faulty are :

- (1) Militancy/terrorism/naxalite activities.
- (2) Prolonged failure of power supply.

- (3) Remote and in-accessible areas with poor transport facilities causing problems in movement of men and materials.
- (4) Suspected technical inadequacy of the equipment.
- (5) Overhead physical transmission media which is prone to thefts and damages due to environmental reasons.
- (6) Misuse of the battery of equipment by the users.
- (7) Inadequate repair/maintenance facilities of MARR equipment of different makes.

Statement-III

There are 11264 VPTs lying out of order as on 10.3.97. The loss of revenue on this account is not very large.

Apart from this a total of 98 small capacity exchanges are lying out of order which have been burnt/damaged by the Militants/terrorists in Andhra Pradesh (86 nos.) and J and K (12 nos.). As it is not possible to restore them due to prevailing law and order situation, hence no loss can be attributed on account of lack of maintenance.

STD connectivity is not available in 2 small exchanges in Arunachal Pradesh due to failure of satellite links. Loss on this account is negligible.

SHRI RAM TAHAL CHAUDHARY : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I am not satisfied with the reply given by the hon. Minister, because though one can understand that the telephone system is disturbed in Kashmir because of extremist activities but what are the reasons that the telephone system is not in order in other states as well. By giving exaggerated figures some telephone connections are definitely provided, but later on they are not properly maintained. Whether these are properly functioning or not. For example, maximum number i.e., 3347 telephones are lying out of order in Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. The main reason behind this, that I can comprehend is that the equipment purchased by the Telephone Department are of low standard which are out of order very soon. Once the telephone is installed, no officer or employee does visits to see whether it is functioning properly. I do not want to repeat the suggestions given by the hon. Minister to improve the system, but the situation will not improve only by giving suggestions. Through you, I would like to submit to the hon. Minister that the officers of the exchange should go periodically, say weekly, to see whether the telephones installed are functioning properly or not. I demand that system of collecting such information is extremely necessary otherwise, inspite of Government's expenses the common public is not benefitted to that extent which they should get. The few suggestions given by the hon. Minister to improve this system ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : What is your question?

SHRI RAM TAHAL CHAUDHARY : Telephones remain out of order almost everywhere. I would like to know, by when the few suggestions given by the hon. Minister would be implemented?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : I am first a Member of Parliament and then a Minister and I am elected amongst the masses. The hon. Members and the august House is concerned about the telephones in the rural areas, and it is our concern as well, and we are not fully satisfied with it. The amount of money that is spent on the rural telephone is not being properly utilised. So we have ordered the C.B.I. to investigate whether all the formalities - technical, financial - are adopted rightly or not or the equipment is purchased arbitrarily. We have given this directive also that after contacting the hon. Members the District level officers will tell them how many telephones are in working condition, and how many are out of order, so that you know the right position, and you will also be able to observe when the right information is being given or not. Besides, we are giving telephone connections under MARR system and this is the last fortnight of 1996-97. The system of the Government is such that most of the Government works are usually completed in the last fortnight of the financial year. We have also given the instructions that priority should be given to all the suggestions or recommendations given by our hon. Member. If they can't instal they should explain why they can't instal it or why they can't consider his recommendations.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Hon. Member's question was about the six suggestion you have given and the time by which these would be implemented.

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : We have issued instructions in this connection and monitoring cells have been opened in every C.G.M. circle, through which we will be monitoring regularly, and we will seek the co-operation of all of you. We have associated hon. Members also in monitoring.

SHRI RAM TAHAL CHAUDHARY : Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wanted to know the time limit but the Hon. Minister did not say anything about it. Along with the time-limit, I would also like to know by when telephone facility would be provided by the Government to the divisions and Block Head quarters where it has not been provided till date e.g. in my Bihar State, at Aurangabad there are many Block Headquarters where there is no telephone facility, Sunato, Gudmu etc. in Ranchi and other headquarters there are no telephones. By when telephone facility would be provided there? Besides by what time telephone facility would be provided at every Panchayat level? The hon. Minister has just now said about CBI enquiry into the bunglings but he has not categorically stated the time by which enquiry would be completed. I would also like to know from the hon. Minister. Till now how many people have been examined during the process of investigation and

what action has been taken thereon. I would like to know all these things from the hon. Minister?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Sir, the orders of investigation have been given just now and now we will consider in the Department about the time-limit. As far as the hon. Member has said about the Block Headquarters, it is true that there should be exchanges at the Block Headquarters. Next year we would issue directions that in the next financial year block headquarters should also be covered for opening exchanges on priority basis.

SHRI RAMSHAKAL : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, in this connection the criteria are not followed at all, and the influential people in the society who can afford to pay and grease the palms of officials are provided with telephone connections. May I know from the hon. Minister whether he has received any complaint in this connection and if so what action has he taken against the corrupt officers?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Are you asking about Mirzapur?

SHRI RAMSHAKAL : Yes.

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, hon. Member has himself told me about Mirzapur. We have also ordered vigilance enquiry of the case, and directed the officers to set up VPT wherever the hon. Member wishes to get it installed. The officers will obey, and if VPT can not be installed, the officers will explain to you as to why it can not be installed.

[English]

SHRI N.S.V. CHITTHAN : Mr. Deputy-Speaker, Sir, every day we are talking about the rural upliftment. The public telephones in villages are expected to give easy communication facilities to villages. But in most of the villages, these telephones are not at all working. For example, in my Dindigul Parliamentary constituency, there are hundreds of telephones which are not working for the past several months.

The hon. Minister has given some details in his reply. It is very much disappointing. I do not know whether they are disappointing us or the officers who gave this information are disappointing themselves. In the reply, it is stated that in Haryana, all the telephones are working, in Kerala also, all the telephones are working, and about Calcutta, Delhi and Chennai, the information is not available... (Interruptions) In Tamilnadu, only 45 telephone exchanges are out of order. This is what is given in the reply. How can I believe it?

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : What is your question?

SHRI N.S.V. CHITTHAN : I am coming to the question. I want to know from the hon. Minister whether the Government is having any correct picture of telephone exchanges that are not working in this country. How many village public telephones are there in our country? Has the Government gone into the details of

the erring officials? Has the Government got any figure regarding the action taken against those officials?
...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Please listen to him first.

(Interruptions)

[Translation]

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : The information which the hon. Member is seeking is given in my reply to the main question. Whether the information which we are getting from the field is correct or otherwise will be investigated by an independent agency. The 400 instruments which were introduced in the beginning have proved failure. We know it and we will get it investigated by the C.B.I. or an independent agency. We are conducting the enquiry ourselves to know the reasons of its failure. We are not satisfied ourselves. We do agree with your feelings that these rural telephones are not functioning properly. We are investigating into it and we need your co-operation.

SHRIMATI RAJANI PATIL : Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to know from the hon. Minister...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Please be seated. It is an important question. I am aware of it. So I will allow more than five supplementary questions on it.

(Interruptions)

SHRI RAJIV PRATAP RUDY : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, as you yourself are admitting that it is a most important issue, I, therefore, request to kindly allow half an hour discussion in this issue...(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : It is alright. Let the supplementary be taken up first. After that half-an-hour discussion will also be allowed. Please sit down.

(Interruptions)

SHRIMATI RAJANI PATIL : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, the Minister is not but the statement which he has given regarding telephone exchanges and rural PCO's lying out of order, he has told therein that only 204 rural PCO's are out of order in Maharashtra. He cannot go everywhere but whether the information which he has received is based on the reality? More than 204 rural PCO's are lying out of order in my own constituency.

He has evaded the reply which was expected from him to part (f) of the question. How best the telephone officials/officers are discharging their duties is known to all? I would like to know to whether you have any time-bound programme regarding the selection process of the members of the Committee to be constituted to conduct inquiry into the malpractices being committed in the Telephone department and do you intend to include any Member of Parliament in that Committee?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, I don't know whether information is correct or not but I have directed to an independent agency to find

out the facts...(Interruptions) There is a institution in Hyderabad, one institution is in U.P. also. We invited quotations from them and very soon orders shall be placed with them. We have given a separate order to the CBI to conduct an inquiry regarding administrative or financial fault if found therein we ourselves are not satisfied with this information. That is why we have ordered an inquiry.

As far as the involvement of M.Ps is concerned, we have issued instructions to the field officers that they should inform the MPs regarding the actual number of VPTs functioning there so that they may be able to know whether their information is correct or not...(Interruptions) We have issued instructions...(Interruptions). We shall take action against those who do not provide information...(Interruptions)

SHRI RATILAL KALIDAS VERMA : All this information is wrong. Not even a single telephone is in order...(Interruptions)

SHRI NITISH KUMAR : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, House is not satisfied with the reply given by the Hon'ble Minister and inspite of being Minister he himself is not satisfied with this information. How the constitutional problem arises because the Minister is accountable to the House and he is also Head of the department. If he himself is not satisfied then what is he doing in the Ministry? Any how we can realize his problem. Till yesterday he was engaged in political problems of Uttar Pradesh. Today their problem has been solved, they have almost lost U.P.

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : It is not a question of Uttar Pradesh.

(Interruptions)

SHRI NITISH KUMAR : I am coming to the question, It has a political commotion. They had no time. They have given datas with regard to Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and all over the country. Complaints are being received even from those places where there are last-chances of it. We challenge him that whatever figures he has submitted regarding Bihar are quite wrong. The Members from Madhya Pradesh are also saying the same that the figures in respect of their State are wrong. We would like to know through you whether he has got time to spare from his political engagements and whether by utilising his time he will be able to give correct figure. He himself admitted that most of the telephones in Bihar are out of order whereas not even 5 per cent telephones are in order in the villages. It is a reality. He told that he was giving directions to the Field officers to provide information to the Members of Parliament regarding the VPT's lying out of order alongwith the location thereof. What will be tell us? We know that all telephones are out of order. Informing us is not so important, What is required to keep them in order. We want to know that whether it is possible for the Hon'ble

Minister to leave Delhi and Lucknow to verse this problem personally in the state capitals particularly in Patna? Whether he will call all the officers and the Members of Parliament to discuss this problem so as to find out some way for improvement in the functioning of the telephone department? I cannot tell a lie in the House. If I am not satisfied, I shall never say that I am satisfied. We ourselves are emphasising the fact that VPTs are not functioning properly. Nitishji is my friend for the last 20 years. If they continue changing their colour the problems shall continue to arise.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Come to the question.

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : You have given suggestion of monitoring. I agree with you ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I shall allow, I have already noted down it. Let him speak first.

SHRI DATTA MEGHE : In the reply it was told that it has also been asked whether at the time of placement of order for procurement of MRRR equipments for VPTs, all administrative, technical and financial norms have been taken into account? Due to some technical faults VPTs do not functioning properly. You told all this about VPTs. But you should pay attention towards the personal telephones for which bill is paid quarterly. Their telephones are also out of order. Whenever any Member of Parliament writes to the concerned officers, they reply that the work is not to be done by the MP, it is to be done by their staff. Whenever we visit their offices, they seem to be reluctant to meet us. What action you shall take against them for their such attitude?

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Mr. Meghe, what is your question?

SHRI DATTA MEGHE : The complaint of MP is not attended to.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Alright, it is your question.

SHRI DATTA MEGHE : You issue directions to the effect than the letters of Member of Parliament must be acknowledged. What are you going to do in this regard?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : If any officer ignores an Hon'ble Member of Parliament, he does not deserve to a officer. We shall consult you and Hon'ble Speaker also on this matter. We want your more participation in this regard so that more suggestion may come up.

[English]

SHRI SONTOSH MOHAN DEV : This is not correct. When I was Minister for Communications, there was a standing instruction that all SDOTs and DETs, by rotation, should contact the Members of Parliament and verify whether they have any complaint or anything like that about them. This has been withdrawn subsequently not by him but by somebody else. That instruction must go. Otherwise, it is true that no officer would listen to us. Members of Parliament should be contacted every now

and then by holding Consultative Committee meetings or Zonal Committee meetings. Let them discuss with the Members of Parliament and know about their complaints or suggestions. When they have got free telephones, why are they not doing that? So, I request the hon. Minister to kindly give that instruction as per his assurance.

SHRI SOMNATH CHATTERJEE : This is an advisory supplementary!

[Translation]

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : We have not implemented the instructions thereof. After your consent and permission we shall meet Hon'ble Speaker and get it implemented. Till now the Member of Parliament were included in the telephone Advisory Committee. We are thinking about it that all MPs should be included in the telephone Advisory Committee so that it may be more effective...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : I shall ask the fact benches also to speak. Let him be heard first.

SHRI GULAM MOHD. MIR MAGANI : Due to terrorism all telephones in Jammu and Kashmir are out of order. 12 telephone exchanges were set on fire. No PCO is working there. I would like to know by when these telephones shall put in order and there 12 telephone exchange be repaired? Simultaneously I would like to know by when telephone services between Delhi and Laddakh shall be restored?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : We shall try with the our firm will to redress your grievances at the earliest possible. If you want to have a discussion on this issue, We also want that there should be complete discussion on the subject so that the feelings of all the people are reflected...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Please listen one thing. You are also not subject and even the Minister is also not satisfied. It would be better if you have half-an-hour discussion or have a discussion under some rule.

(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : How there will be one hour discussion. You may speak at that time. The Minister has also agreed.

(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : We have spent 25 minutes on just one point.

[English]

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : How many Half-an-hour discussions you will allow, Sir? I wanted to put a very categorical question.

[Translation]

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Sit down please. I will allow others also.

DR. SATYANARAYAN JATIA : The Government spent crores of rupees on spreading the Radio Telephone system in the villages. But at that time the excessive telephone system expended in the country in the name of Pam Petroda. Wait-battery is used in Radio telephone system which slowly and slowly, gets discharged. Due to this, it stops functioning. Now that system is being replaced by the solar battery system. May I ask you to let us know the names of the places where this system of Radio Telephone has been set-up? What are the steps proposed to be taken by the Government to set up such telephone exchanges in these villages where waiting list has been prepared for providing connections to the consumers?

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : We are trying to achieve our target fixed for this year. Now we have introduced zero maintenance battery. Apart from this directions have been issued to achieve the target as soon as possible...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : O.K. Let us consume the whole time on only one point.

SHRI L. RAMANA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, In Andhra Pradesh, 86, small Exchanges have been damaged due to the ongoing militant activities. In this connection, I have also held meetings with the hon'ble Minister. The Minister did set up a Review Committee in this respect consisting the Chief General Manager of Andra Pradesh and Divisional Manager Telephone of my district. I want to know as to when these 86 small Exchanges are likely to start functioning alongwith the steps taken by the Government to provide telephone connection to the Sarpanch and local people?

[English]

AN HON. MEMBER : Sir, Members from Jammu and Kashmir and Andhra Pradesh should be heard.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Please, listen to his reply.

[Translation]

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : It is a fact that much damage was done to the Telephone Exchanges by the terrorism. Elsewhere also, such complaints have been received, therefore, we have included M.Ps. also in our job and requested them to give report themselves. We will try our best that these are repaired at the earliest.

[English]

SHRI BASU DEB ACHARIA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, one year back under West Bengal sub-Telecom circle, a 120-channel equipment was installed in my Constituency at Adra. Only six channels are working. The Telephone Exchange also is not working properly for the last three years. I am not getting any telephone either from Delhi or from my Constituency. May I know from the Minister whether he will take steps so that the 120-channel equipment, which was installed one year

back at Adra Exchange under West Bengal sub-Telecom Circle, starts functioning?

[Translation]

SHRI BENI PRASAD VARMA : Mr. Deputy Speaker, Sir, Shri Acharia ji is one of our most respectful members. I will issue directions to the concerned officers today itself to look into his complaints...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Half an hour has been spent on this question...*(Interruptions)*

SHRI RAM KRIPAL YADAV : I have not been called ...*(Interruptions)*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : Much time has been spent on this question. Half an hour has been devoted on one question.

(Interruptions)

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER : You may give it for Half an Hour Discussion. It will last for one hour on its own.

(Interruptions)

[English]

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER : Please maintain decorum.

Uplinking Facilities

*362. DR. M. JAGANNATH : Will the Minister of INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING be pleased to state :

(a) whether giving uplinking facilities on Indian soil to satellite television channels will help earn more foreign exchange and also increase employment potential;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the fee proposed to be levied on private channels for uplinking from Indian soil; and

(d) the steps taken to popularise the Doordarshan international channel?

THE MINISTER OF CIVIL AVIATION AND MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING (SHRI C.M. IBRAHIM) : (a) to (c) The issue of permitting uplinking facilities from Indian soil is related to the question of permitting private broadcasting from within the country. This and other related issues would be taken care of by the proposed broadcasting bill which is likely to be introduced during the current session of Parliament.

(d) Various measures such as increasing the telecast time, showing programmes/films including in regional languages for benefit of NRIs, live telecasting of events of national importance, publicising channel programmes and schedules etc. have been taken to increase the popularity of Doordarshan International. Further, our missions abroad have been asked to give wide publicity to the telecast schedules and also give